

## FRENCH INDO-CHINA

proximity to Cambodia and Siam, and to its commercial prosperity.

Cordial relations were maintained by the Prince of Vientiane with the now decadent Khmers, and with the King of Siam against Luang-Prabang and Burma. This alliance provoked three successive invasions on the part of the Burmese, who, though invariably victorious, were defeated by the country itself and forced eventually by famine and sickness to withdraw. The seventeenth century brought a period of needed peace both foreign and domestic. European travellers of the time have left accounts of the brilliance of contemporary Vientiane. The best narrative is by a Dutchman, Van Wusthoff, in 1641, who came to establish trade relations between Vientiane and Batavia, and it is corroborated by the accounts of two Jesuits, Martini and Marini.

Early in the eighteenth century a series of civil wars over succession to the throne brought this peaceful period to a bloody close. Armamite support of one candidate provoked a fatal rift between Vientiane and Luang-Prabang. These now mutually jealous principalities called in foreign support, to the inevitable annihilation of Laotian independence,

Vientiane was totally eclipsed as a result and Luang-Prabang fell under the double tutelage of Annam and Siam.

When Luang-Prabang was an independent state, two kings, one for peace and one for war, headed its government. The former was the real ruler, and he could select as his successor any one of his dired heirs. Five Ministers were appointed by the king as his aides. There was also an assembly, the Sena, to which certain families automatically belonged by hereditary right. Land was divided into provinces and sub-divided into districts, each with an appropriate official taken from

the five classes of mandarins. The people furnished requisitioned labour, soldiers for the army, and paid a head tax. Further revenues brought in by opium, salt, and alcohol farms, by taxes on ivory soctab, &od by tariff duties.

The naturally had a 'different organization for the lauds successively conquered around the Mekong. The country into and subdivided into *mmamgs*, cantons, and A'Siamese official, the Kha Luong, visited the provinces disputes between the mandarins .and the to and to see in general that the country ran The left a mmrkable amount of liberty to their respected local iijstitiitloHS and custom^ an triiwfe, nttfifcuy service and *conies\** like a A ^*m-im* ^*mg*y was named for life, 3%